Article

Adolescents as Agents of Change: Digital Text-Making for Social Justice

Anne Burke, Ph.D.
University of Ontario Institute of Technology

Shawnee Hardware
University of Ontario Institute of Technology

Janette Hughes, Ph.D.
University of Ontario Institute of Technology

Stephanie Thompson
University of Ontario Institute of Technology

Abstract

This article chronicles a research study in two middle schools in Canada where teachers and learners were engaged to create and integrate digital texts representative of social justice issues into the school curriculum. The article illustrates through samples of digital texts the tacit skills of students that are not readily seen in schools. Centred within a multiliteracies pedagogy (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), young adolescents were exposed to global issues through critical readings of children's social justice picture books and young adult novels (Freire & Macedo, 1987, Christenson, 2000) . The adolescents' critical reading and writing of digital and print texts raised understanding of the nexus between socio-political and economic injustice, hence showing them as critical agents of change within their school communities.

Introduction

In the past decade, the landscape of communication has altered radically, changing notions of literacy and the orientation of literacy education. As a result, today's literate citizens need to develop higher order thinking or problem solving skills (Lewis & Smith, 1993), are highly engaged in classroom learning, fully understand critical literacy wherein students use "the language of critique" (Lau, 2013, p. 2) to analyze sociopolitical perspectives on school learning, and display their connectedness to the world (Hague & Payton, 2011). In responding to the needs of this new landscape, multiliteracies, where the use of multimodality is used to honor the cultural and linguistic diversity in schools (New London Group, 1996) may offer a pedagogical understanding wherein literate engagements have: a fluid nature, offer multiplicity in design, and contain a social character which embraces a sociocultural view, asserting

diversity in meanings, purposes, audiences and contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). In the technological landscape of the 21st century, the printed text is no longer the most significant cultural tool to be deployed in shaping our social attitudes and beliefs (Walsh, 2009). In determining these ideologies, multimodal texts may assist and command community outreach, thereby generating a new group of users who may be more globally conscious of the plight of others, while lacking the critical awareness of the use of such cultural tools (Alvermann, 2011). Using a Critical Literacy approach, which is the "analysis and critique of the power relationships among texts, language, social groups and social practices" (Hughes, 2007, para. 2), is akin to the creative use of multimodal texts. In this social justice research project, we challenged adolescents to shape a number of texts building on their critical interpretation and understandings of how their reading and writing of digital and multimodal texts could lead their school community to social action, empowerment and change.

Critical literacy and multiliteracies stem from critical pedagogy— a theoretical framework which examines the implications of education with the politics of culture (Apple, 1993; 2011). These two approaches work to transform literacy beyond "the mechanical learning of reading and writing skills" (Macedo, 2005, p. 12) to a political phenomenon which "must be analyzed within the context of a theory of power relations and an understanding of social and cultural reproduction and production" (Macedo, 2005, p. 13). Critical literacy mandates students to assume that "power relations within language construct inequalities and systematically marginalize particular groups in society" (Jones & Enriquez, 2011, p. 149). Multiliteracies pedagogy builds upon the limitations in critical literacy by first situating students' learning using culturally responsive teaching and then providing overt instructions and scaffolding for students in their zone of proximal development. Further to this, there is a subsection of multiliteracies pedadogy that is termed critical framing that recruits students to critically examine texts within their social, cultural and political relevance (Taylor, Bernhard, Garg & Cummins, 2008; Yelland, Cope & Kalantzis, 2008). Another connection between the two approaches is the use of multimodality. Jewitt (2009) explained that multimodality is instrumental in developing students' critical literacy skills

since it helps students to better analyze how the different modes enhance or limit the understanding of the intended meanings in texts. Further to this, Wolfe and Flewitt (2010) noted that new media greatly impact on the "children's development as 'literate' beings and on their learning more generally" (p.388). Consequently, both critical literacy and multiliteracies pedagogy position students to create alternative reading positions for analyzing and questioning of texts. In some instances, both frameworks allow students to apply the knowledge they gained to construct new texts that are relevant to their own lives or to correct the errors in existing designs (Kalantzis and Cope, 2008).

Relevant Literature

Socio-cultural theorists (Street, 2003; Marsh, 2011 & Mclean, 2011) demand a critical perspective to the nature of literacy in light of the changing demographics of many schools as a result of globalization and the change in the educational climate due to standardization. Therefore, Pirbhai-Illich (2010), Vasudevan, Schultz and Bateman (2010) and Cumming- Potvin (2009) saw critical literacy facilitated through multiliteracies pedagogy as salient for increasing students' awareness of social justice locally, regionally, and internationally. Added to this, Burnett (2010) noted that "while some textual practices involving new technologies replicate those associated with print texts, or old literacies, others are associated with … new literacies, patterned by distributed relationships, multiple identities, multimodality and global participation (p. 248)" and motivate students to become global citizens. The onus is therefore on educators to use multiliteracies pedagogy and critical literacy to enhance students' global citizenship and enactments of social justice (Greenhow, Robella & Hughes, 2009).

We focused on fostering understandings of social justice through the utilization of Critical Literacy as an analysis and critique of the power relationships among texts, language, social groups and social practices. It shows us ways of looking at texts of all kinds (print, visual, spoken, multimedia and performance texts) in order to examine and challenge the attitudes, values and beliefs that lie beneath the surface. It empowers teachers and students to participate in a democratic society (a just society regardless of race, culture, class, gender or sexual orientation) and move literacy beyond text to actual social action.

Freire and Macedo (1987) viewed critical literacy as a vehicle for students and their teachers to learn to *read the world*. The previously mentioned authors pointed out that "Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (p. 25). Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) identified four dimensions of critical literacy which include: (1) disrupting a common situation or understanding (seeking to understand the text or situation in more or less detail to gain perspective); (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints (standing in the shoes of others or thinking about texts from perspectives of different characters or from perspectives not represented in the texts; (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues (thinking about power in relationships between and among people and exploring how power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions); and (4) taking action and promoting social justice (reflecting and acting to change an inappropriate, unequal power relationship between people).

Linda Christensen (2000) used the term "rising up" because "reading and writing should be emancipatory acts" (p. vii). She argued that when students are taught to read "the word and world, their minds become unshackled" (Christensen, 2000, p. vii). Christensen reminded us that educators must teach students how to *read* not only "novels and science texts, but cartoons, politicians, schools, workplaces, welfare offices, and Jenny Craig ads" (2000, p. vii). Students who are able to *read* injustices are engaged in what Christensen called *rising up* reading, which is "reading that challenges, that organizes for a better world" (p. vii). Digital texts require readers to read more critically. Stevens and Bean (2007) asserted that the "sheer volume and varying formats" of available texts "demand sharper uses of critical lenses" (p. 17). The plethora of new and emerging digital texts, and the affordances that come with them, need to be taken into account in the literacy classroom. Affordances provided through digital texts are often used to assert agency, action and change, in total offering a different experience from that commonly offered by a printed text.

The concept of multiliteracies, as conceived by The New London Group (1996) highlighted the relevance of new forms of literacy associated with emerging multimedia, multimodal technologies. In

addition, a multiliteracies framework takes into consideration "the wide variety of culturally specific forms of literacy evident in complex pluralistic societies" (Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007, p. 46). Traditional forms of literacy that focus solely on reading and writing in the dominant language, typically fail to recognize the impact of digital media in adolescents' lives, or take into account students' multilingual and multicultural backgrounds and experiences.

The argument for a pedagogy that takes into account, not only traditional print and oral literacies, but also visual and multimodal representations, has been well established in the literature (Alvermann, 2004; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; New London Group, 1996). Although there has been increased interest in the use of multimodality in education, the potential of digital media in education is only beginning to be explored. Added to this, there is much work to be done if we are to understand how emerging technologies are changing the literacy and learning practices of today's adolescents (Alvermann & Hutchins, 2012).

The field of young adult literature has been flourishing over the past few years, despite a slumping economy and troubles in the publishing industry (International Reading Association, 2012).This growing collection of books offers adolescents vehicles through which they can explore important societal issues and themes of social justice (Glazier & Seo, 2005; Glenn, 2008;Wolk, 2009). For example, there have been a number of recent books published on the topic of the impact of war on children, including Deborah Ellis's *Breadwinner Trilogy* released as a single volume in September 2009, and N.H. Senzai's *Shooting Kabul* (2010), which deals with children in war-torn Afghanistan. There is also a growing body of literature that supports using literature to help adolescents investigate violence and war and to inspire students to promote peace (Brozo, Walter, & Placker, 2002; Miller, 2005; Wright & Kowalczyk, 2000). In an age when many adolescents' sole experiences with war are gleaned from interaction on their gaming consoles (e.g., *Mortal Kombat*, *Call of Duty: World at War*, *Modern Warfare*, Project *Flashpoint*, and *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced War Fighter* to name only a few popular games), we need to promote more critical understandings of both past and current wars and the

devastating psychologies of war (Noddings, 2006). Between the covers of much young adult literature exists stories that can create awareness, stir emotions and provoke change. Wolk (2009) suggested, "Teaching for social responsibility with good books does far more than encourage civic participation; it redefines the purpose of school and empowers all of us—students, teachers, administrators, parents—to be better people and live more fulfilling lives" (p. 672).

Building Critical Readers and Writers

During the past year, we worked at two separate Canadian middle schools, observing how two teachers and their students integrated digital texts into their school curriculum. They used various genres of children and adolescent literature to raise awareness and consciousness in their school and local communities. Our research study focused on adolescents' critical reading and writing of digital and print texts, texts that deal with global issues and promote an understanding of social justice. Although creating awareness of problems in the world around us is an important first step, it is not enough. Students need to discover that "change occurs only when individuals act to create it" (O'Neil, 2010, p. 48). We feel that the performative potential of digital media facilitates the exploration and creation of digital texts, lending authentic and personal voices to the local and global issues such as world peace, social unrest, future employment opportunities and poverty that adolescents are most concerned about. These texts can, in turn, be shared with others as a way of engendering social change. Emancipatory actions can encourage students to write, read and re-write the world and the word, linking literacy to human agency and the power to "effect social transformation" (Janks, 2010, p. 161).

The impetus to embark on this project came from conversations with the teachers we encountered in our general research, who often wondered whether the presence of technology in their students' lives had contributed to a generation of kids who were quite materialistic and avid consumers. As one teacher shared, "What concerns me is that their technical savviness is centered on them, and their global awareness of others who live in war is tied up with videogame playing." This also acknowledges the larger issue of how the global economy has changed the landscape of youth culture and the education

system in which we teach (Kim & Boyle, 2012). As we have repeatedly examined Canadian school responses to the use of internet, we have come to see how the teaching profession has become one of fierce competition for student attention. Teachers must battle the all-pervasive media and consumer culture for their students' awareness, and at the same time keep a tight control on knowledge access (Page, 2012).

Teaching adolescents to become aware of the world in which they make meaning requires the development of skills in which their voice and actions have both meaning and consequence at the same time (Enciso, 2011). Understanding what this awareness means is an essential component of being a part of a community. Learning what it means to be a "justice-oriented citizen," (Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2008, p.4), which moves beyond the notion of a "personally responsible citizen" (Ibid, 2008, p. 4), requires the development of a literacy community which focuses on open communication, the exchange of viewpoints, the sharing of opinions, as well as the ability to listen attentively to others and demonstrate empathy. Understanding how positive choices contribute to a social consciousness, and how negative choices lead to misunderstandings and conflict, we can help adolescents to embrace our global society. Noddings (1991) wrote extensively about the necessity of schools to teach caring. She argued that "caring" (p. 110) should be at the very heart of our curricula, including caring for ideas, friends, family, the earth and its ecosystems, human-made objects, and "strangers and distant others" (Noddings, 1991, p. 110). As Wolk (2009) pointed out, social responsibility must go far beyond basic citizenship; it must shape "human beings with intellectual curiosity, a caring heart, and a belief in the common good. It should be one of the essential purposes for school" (p. 665). It was with these shared common beliefs among the teachers and researchers we began this research study.

Research Design

In this classroom-based digital literacy project, we explored what happened when adolescents were asked to engage with digital and print texts that focus on the impact of war on children, through the four dimensions of critical literacy: disruption of the commonplace, examination of multiple viewpoints,

focus on social/political issues, and action steps for social justice (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002). The project also asked children to connect with different social justice organizations such as War Child Canada to understand more directly how their own actions and digital media practices could help such causes. The analysis provided in this paper is a part of the larger project which sought to understand how the interactive technologies characteristic of children's digital texts (such as digital posters, stop motion animation, comic life, photostory) engage students in forms which are closer to their own literacy engagements outside of school – such as those seen on social networking sites.

At two separate urban classroom sites, one in central Canada and the other in an Atlantic province, 48 students read and critiqued a variety of digital texts in literacy centres, texts which focused on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and children living in war-torn countries. In small groups of five to six students, they engaged in literature circle or book club activities as they read young adult literature related to the theme of children and war. In the final project, each group created their own digital and multimodal texts to be shared with a wider community as a way of taking action. For example, the students from one class produced a digital text which they shared at a school-wide assembly and raised five hundred dollars to purchase chickens and a bread oven for one third world community. They also shared their work in a variety of venues, including on the project website and, at a classroom Ning – a social networking site set up for the project.

A case study approach was used to research the two settings described above. A case study method is suitable for collecting in-depth stories of teaching and learning through and with digital media. As Bruce (2009) pointed out, case studies "provide the best articulation of adolescents' media literacy processes, especially as much of the emergent forms of their use has not been studied" (p. 302). To that end, Yin (2003) noted that "the distinctive need for case studies arise out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p. 2). There are two different types of case study designs: single-case design and multiple case-study design. The single-case studies design uses one individual or a group comprising of similar interests or characteristics. On the other hand, a multiple case study design uses a "replication

strategy" (Zach, 2006, p. 9) or the process of conducting numerous experiments on related topics. This research uses a single-case study design as each group of adolescents at the two different sites constituted a case. As well, individual students, and their digital texts, were considered as individual cases within each setting.

The research questions which we focus on for this paper are: (1) what is the relationship between digital media and adolescents' understanding of global issues (specifically rights of the child and the impact of war on children), while immersed in using digital media, and (2) how can we use digital texts to critically engage learners to become socially and globally conscious of the plight of others in our world. When students gain understanding of other communities using contemporary media texts, it affords them the opportunity for agency and change in their own lives, within school the community and beyond (Hague & Williamson, 2010).

Data Collection and Analysis

Case studies can be either quantitative or qualitative and in most cases mixed methodologies are used with a triangulation of data collection methods (Zach, 2006). Our analysis was primarily qualitative, in keeping with the established practice of in-depth studies of classroom-based learning and case studies in general (Stake, 2000). Throughout the process, researchers and research assistants acted as participant-observers in the classes and collected data using observation notes, audio-taping of all whole-class sessions, and videotaping of selected classroom proceedings and at the community events. Due to the nature of case studies to understand social phenomenon in depth, a small sample size was used in the study to discuss the use of digital texts in the project. Eight students were interviewed at key points of the unit to gain more in-depth perspective of noteworthy classroom events identified through observation. Follow-up interviews and focus group interviews were conducted with this group of students. In order to improve the validity and reliable of the study, the case study data consisted of: (a) detailed field notes; (b) students' writing; (c) transcribed interviews with students and teachers; (d) the digital texts created by students; and (e) video recordings of selected learning/authoring activities.

Findings and Analysis

Textual Engagements on a Global Stage

Findings in case studies are normally reported as narrative which offers thick rich, descriptions of the data (Stake, 2000). In keeping with that guideline our findings are rich in description supported by narratives. New literacies not only provide students with the tools and resources to find and create information, but can help position them as critical thinkers and users (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). In this study we found that when students were given the digital tools, they embraced the materiality offered by programs like Glogster and Bitstrips. They used these to show how digital texts can engage discourses of social justice, in order to frame it as not just about recognizing issues, but also about inspiring their fellow students to take action. In this particular instance, we see how the modal capacities of the digital posters made the Glogster site the perfect space for students to employ the use of their cultural tools. For many students the power of such texts and the presence of the audience on a global stage required them to think carefully about the materiality of the cultural tools they used to take action. Of thirteen year old Sarah (all student and teacher names are pseudonyms), her teacher Yolanda said, "She is a fine writer and can respond in written form quite readily, but definitely preferred to create texts like brochures, informational pages and posters as opposed to traditional written responses." For Sarah and many of the students in our study, "New Literacies invite powerful interconnections among many people, embracing multiple perspectives which are represented through the semiotic diversification of text" (Burke, 2009, p. 40).

Through student interviews, we saw how the authoring of digital texts provided them an authorial voice of concern to share on a global stage through the use of the digital poster templates on the Glogster site, www.glogster.com. Essentially, Glogs are interactive digital posters composed of text, images, video and audio clips (GlogsterEdu, 2013). Its diversity of use in designs and applications engages the learning capacities of students with a variety of learning competencies. Drawing on the students' voices of agency in our social justice awareness project, they found ways to combine different images, texts and sounds to

share their understanding of specific global issues. Students were well versed in the use and purpose of the poster but had not created digital posters.

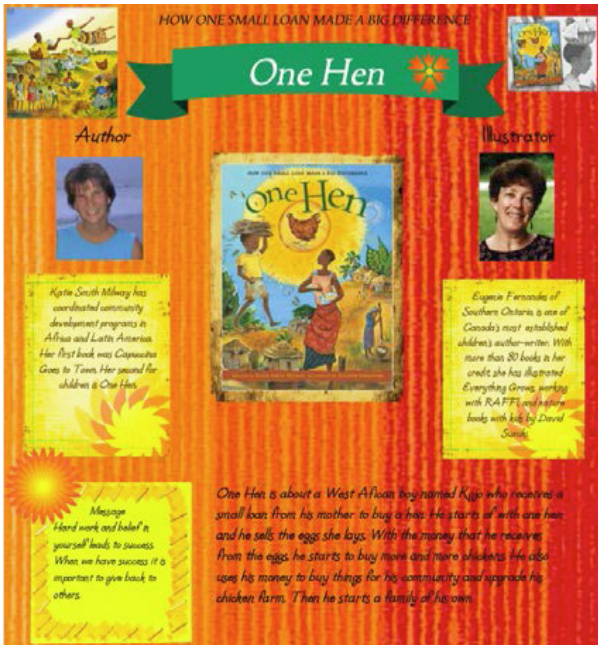
Students were asked to read from a series of related social justice picture books, and to look at a number of websites such as www.freethechildren.com and www.oxfam.org.uk.com, reshaping their social and cultural understandings of war. Combining traditional language arts writing with digital social studies, students were asked to create posters based on the Articles in the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child. Tara, age 13, shared her thoughts about the creation of the Glog, explaining "I think what makes it interesting is that there are so many ways that you can personalize it. You can add sound and effects, multitude of pictures and many different words. Glogsters (sic) really hit you with all five senses."

Figure 1. Engaging the Five Senses through Multimodality

It was within the offerings of these different modalities that we found students explored, manipulated and engaged various cultural tools to bring awareness to others. Another student named Juna (pseudonym)

said, "I chose the wallpaper for my poster because it is like the colors on the book, it also reminds me of the type of clothes that the characters wore in the book, it is happy and sunny, I think people would want to read the book after seeing the poster." Her response speaks to how she has entwined her desire to shape the modal resources of Glogster to achieve her own cultural purposes, which involved sharing the social justice theme of action "one can make a change for many," as found in Katie Milway's book *One Hen: How One Small Loan Made a Difference*.

Figure 2. Juna's Digital Poster



In her Glog, Juna has critically selected visual modes to engage the reader. In this classroom, the teacher asked that students share their digital posters with other children on an electronic interactive whiteboard in class. Students were asked to discuss the material used to represent their critical authorial choices. Yolanda said that she wanted students to see the variety of forms and ways we "connect the ideas of equality, celebration of difference, appreciation of one's own situation, and care for fellow human beings." She also shared the digital literature discussion in the form of the Glogs raised the students' awareness of the plight of others as presented through the websites and social justice novels and picture books.

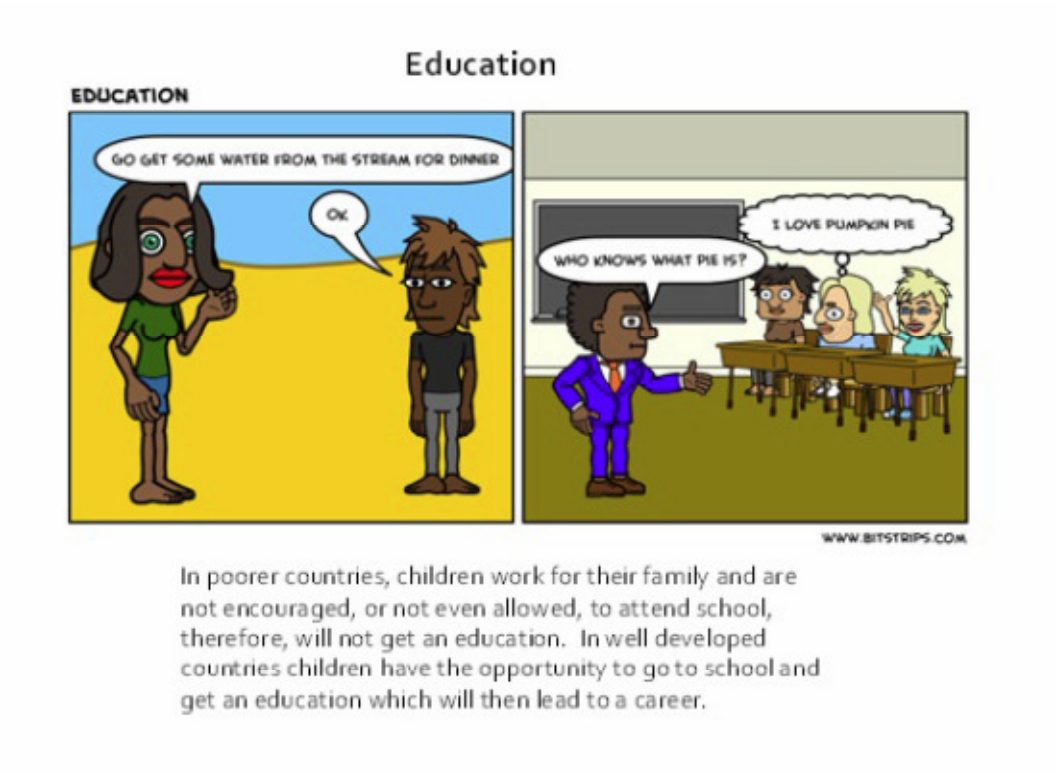
Critical Producers and Viewers

The performative value of the digital texts viewed and produced through the digital literacy centres helped students to develop critical perspectives and viewpoints of socio-political issues. At one digital literacy centre, students viewed a number of videos and slide presentations responding to critical questions about the content of the videos. After seeing children from war torn countries such as Afghanistan on television, one student commented that the images were not as vivid or "real as looking at their lives on the Internet". When probed more about why they are not the same, he said the website showed and offered more information which made it "more real for him." Engaging with a plurality of texts and designs offered though the websites shared at each of the digital literacy centres, the classroom teachers found reading varying genres of text on a website aided students in developing critical and multiple viewpoints (Williams, 2009). The information gained by students was represented in a number of digital projects, such as digital poems, and music videos with original lyrics. The students also created graphic novellas using programs like ComicLife and Bitstrips to engage in a design process whereby the "designing transforms knowledge by producing new constructions and representations of reality" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 22).

Another participant named Chris (pseudonym) used the cartoon imagery and voice balloons available on Bitstrips as his authorial voice after reading the book *Shooting Kabul* and Deborah Ellis's series on the story of Parvana, a young girl who loses her father during the rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan. He said his project was showing "the differences of the lives of people in places like Afghanistan and the lives of people in places like Canada, where we live." For Chris, looking at differing viewpoints provided him a chance to represent through image, dialogue, and gestural movements of the characters the differences between life in Canada and Afghanistan. In this slide on education (see Figure 3), he contrasted the child's working life compared to the lives of Canadian children in school pictured as apathetic and bored with the lesson being taught. The dialogue balloons and thought bubbles expressed

share multiple viewpoints with the factual information discussing the sociopolitical issues which affect the lives of children in both countries.

Figure 3. Creation of a digital text using Bitstrips to create a comparative essay.



Critical Reflection and Taking Action

Students also had a chance to respond through classroom blogs on the issues of social justice as discussed in the books. In this blog post the classroom teacher asked students to discuss how the characters took social action to right a wrong in their novels. *Bifocal,* by Deborah Ellis and Eric Walters, is a novel which focuses on contrasting two characters' viewpoints about an incident of social discrimination against Arabs, triggered when a school responds to a local bomb with a lock down. Teachers who used this book felt that students responded to the characters' viewpoints, but more importantly really thought about the socio-political issues in the book. Alice shared:"Social injustice and racism is a difficult obstacle to overcome, but I believe Haroon has the right mindset to conquer this hardship. I feel by the end of the book he will have forced his way through society's bias, maybe even

becoming friends with Jay eventually." Alice's response shows how she has engaged in the book through the perceptions of another, but also demonstrated an astute political awareness of how stereotypical viewpoints shape the beliefs of society and the actions of many. Christenson (2000) reminded us that reading and teaching opportunities for children to read *injustices*, leads to a *rising up* reading for the child, where awareness guides critical understanding of the reality of the world in which we live.

In this study, we purposely engaged learners in a digital capacity in order to find a familiar place for their writing. We felt that the study drew upon the tacit skills that are not readily seen in schools, and used these to bring awareness and action on behalf of the schools. In the post-project survey, many students shared that they got more than they bargained for in terms of awareness and knowledge, compared to when they were just doing "book talks with some digital stuff," as one student commented. The materiality and affordance engagement offered within the creation of digital texts realized a potential for students to assert agency, action and change. In the post-survey students shared responses which assert agency: "Yes it has inspired me to raise awareness for the victims of the war, because people need to know about this and what is going on and happening to the children who have to fight in the war." Action became a real possibility, as seen through this comment: "I would like to take action whether it is donating money or raising awareness myself." The students also became aware of their own thinking, and began to question their own actions: "I am now going to donate to charities helping war-torn countries." Although students gained greater knowledge of the plight of other children, they had opportunities to engage this critical awareness and active agency through the reading and creating of digital texts. As Samantha Nutt, founder of War Child Canada asserts, "Education is the greatest gift any of us can receive. It is the dividing line between dependence and interdependence, between ignorance and tolerance, between hope and despair."

Implications for Practice and Future Research

We felt that this study brought new understanding for education and global awareness, with the affordances and agency given to students through the creation and performance of digital texts. The

project engaged and made students aware of social justice issues that exist outside of Canada. As the study progressed, so too did students' understanding of the nexus between the socio-political and economic injustice. Additionally, students became more adept in using digital texts as they explored the capacities of the digital tools and the depths to which different modes could communicate powerful meanings. Social media such as glogs are also good motivational tools for students learning as they dismantle "power relationships, providing access that encouraged all students to participate, allowing students to draw from their diverse discourses and informal codes and valuing the creativity and innovation of their design" (Reid, 2010, p. 63). Consequently, at the end of the project, students metamorphosed into critical agents of change.

In support of a multiliteracies approach, it is vital that educators better understand how adolescents, (who have grown up in a digital age), use and interact with digital media in the context of their writing (Honan, 2008). Once teachers are able to work more multiliteracies projects into their syllabi, we advocate that they develop a community of practice (Cumming-Potvin, 2009) where they can share their knowledge and expertise to "encourage critical and socially just literacy learning" (Ibid, 2009, p. 82) in classrooms. This would help develop a theoretical basis for teaching practices that can draw and build upon the digital literacies that students already possess, albeit in a nascent form, and which remain largely untapped in classroom contexts.

There also needs to be more professional development to engage educators in ways to assess multimodal texts. Jewitt (2003) highlighted that new understanding is needed to evaluate texts as "multimodal representations change the entities that are to be examined" (2003, p. 98). Some of these assessment procedures may include: distributive assessment in which teachers and students collaborate on what needs to accessed; peer to peer assessment, that will allow students a chance to help each other with digital literacy and slideshadowing that gives students the chance assess their work during its different stages of development with scaffolding from teachers (McClay & Mackey, 2009) .This model provides opportunities for multimodal texts to be better understood, hence appraised more accurately. It can also be

used as a solution for what Bearne (2009) classified as "tensions and difficulties in setting up assessment procedures at a national level for multimodality" (p.15), which ultimately affects the how teachers carry out their assessment.

As in the case with Sarah who is competent using the traditional form of literacy but prefers to create digital texts, other students, especially those who struggle to manipulate print base literacies, stand to gain immensely through greater use of digital texts in schools (Gunter & Kenny, 2008). In this discussion of our study we feel this type of engagement with digital texts shows how adolescents need to be prepared with the skills necessary to be active and engaged learners, learners who can act as critical citizens in ways that show how they are socially and morally responsible. Building on their sense of what community and responsibility means involves placing them in a world where they can act with confidence and commitment, with an understanding of the positive difference they can make in their communities (Brennan, Barnett & Baugh, 2007). By developing a global sense of others' conflicts and suffering, we offer our future generations a chance to care for others, by seeing their own responsibility and imagining a role for themselves in the solution. Through learning critical thinking and problem solving, adolescents come to understand their own efforts to provide solutions in a way in which community may be created – a way that advocates and promotes agency for change (Wilson, Dasho, Martin, Wallerstein, Wang & Minkler, 2007). This awareness of others, and how their actions are directly related to others, is how we want adolescents to understand their world.

Conclusion

Multiliteracies pedagogy prompts a transformation of teaching and learning from a neutral position to one that involves critical pedagogy that moves students to adapt a social justice identity (Crafton, Silvers & Brennan, 2009). Further, its relative, critical literacy, enables students to scrutinize texts for power imbalances that are entrenched in the socio-political fabrics of many societies. By exposing adolescents to global issues through digital texts, the study provided opportunities for them to retrieve information through the ever-present multimodality found within digital texts which motivated

them to be agents of change. As demonstrated in the findings, the participants critically analyzed the information they retrieved from the different digital texts. Their glogs also proved that they critiqued the texts they were shown, as they selected contents that they perceived to be the authentic experiences of the personas in the text they were examining.

Therefore, digital texts are an excellent resource for engaging learners in issues of social justice (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2011). In the not so distant future, no community with be spared of the effects of these global issues. Consequently, school learning should not be limited to explicating these phenomena but also help students to find solutions for global problems. Finally, using digital texts might be difficult to evaluate, yet teachers must endeavor to reach beyond traditional accountability to understand that teaching and learning must also be an act of agency in itself. Ultimately the use of digital texts in their social justice teaching practice provides students with agency and a voice, hence empowering them to be social justice advocates.

References

Apple, M. (1993).The politics of official knowledge: Does a national curriculum make sense? *Teachers College Record, 95*(2), 222-241.

Apple, M. (2011). Global crises, social justice, and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher*

Education, 62(2), 222-234. doi: 10.1177/0022487110385428

Alvermann, D. E. (2004). Media, information communication technologies, and youth literacies: A cultural studies perspective. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *48*(1), 78–83.

Alvermann, D. E. (2011). Moving on/keeping pace: Youth's literature identities and multimodal digital texts. *National Society for the Study of Education*, *110*(1), 109-128.

Alvermann, D. E., & Hutchins, R. J. (2012). Adolescents' engagement with Web 2.0 and social media: Research, theory, and practice. *Research in the Schools*, *19*(1), 33-44.

Barth, M., & Thomas, I. (2012). Synthesizing case study research-ready for the next step? *Environmental Education Research*, *18*(6), 751-764. doi:10.1080/13504622.2012.662213

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, *13*(4), 544-559. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-4/baxter.pdf.

Bearne, E. (2009). Assessing multimodal texts. In A. Burke & R. F. Hammet (Eds.), *Assessing new literacies: Perspectives from the classroom*, (pp.15-34). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

Brennan, M. A., Barnett, R. V., & Baugh, E. (2007). Youth involvement in community development: Implications and possibilities for extension. *Journal of Extension*, *45*(4). Retrieved from http://www.joe.org/joe/2007august/a3.php.

Brozo, W. G., Walter, P., & Placker, T. (2002). "I know the difference between a real man and a TV man": A critical exploration of violence and masculinity through literature in a junior high school in the 'hood. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *45*(6), 530–538.

Burke, A. (2009). Checkmarks on the screen: Questions of assessment and new literacies in the digital age. In A. Burke & R. F. Hammett (Eds.), *Assessing new literacies: Perspectives from the classroom* (pp. 35-54). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Burnett, C. (2010). Technology and literacy in early childhood educational settings: A review of research. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 10*(3), 247-270. doi:10.1177/1468798410372154

Christensen, L. (2000). *Reading, writing, and rising up: Teaching about social justice and the power of the written word*. Milwaukee, WI: A Rethinking Schools Publication.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research in the next generation.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2004). *Walking the road: Race, diversity, and social justice in teacher education.* New York, NY: Teachers' College Press.

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures.* London/New York: Routledge/Falmer.

Crafton, L. K., Silvers, P., & Brennan, M. (2009). Repositioning art in the early childhood classroom. In M. J. Narey (Ed.), *Making meaning: Constructing multimodal perspectives of language, literacy, and learning through arts-bases early childhood education* (pp.31-51). Pittsburgh, PA: Springer.

Cummins, J., Brown, K., & Sayers, D. (2007). *Literacy, technology, and diversity: Teaching for success in changing times*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Cumming-Potvin, W. (2009). Social justice, pedagogy and multiliteracies: Developing communities of practice for teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *34*(1), 82-99.

Ellis, D. (2009). *The breadwinner trilogy*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books

Enciso, P. (2011). Storytelling in critical literacy pedagogy: Removing the walls between immigrant and non-immigrant youth. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *10*(1), 21-41.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. P. (1987). *Literacy and reading the word and the world*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

Glazier, J., & Seo, J. (2005). Multicultural literature and discussion as mirror and window. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *48*(8), 686-700.

Glenn, W. (2008). Gossiping girls, insider boys, a-list achievement: Examining and exposing young adult novels consumed by conspicuous consumption. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *52*(1), 34-42.

GlosgterEdu. (2013). What is GlosgterEdu? Retrieved July 06, 2013 from http://edu.glogster.com/what-is-glogster-edu/.

Greenhow, C., Robelia, B., & Hughes, J. E. (2009). Learning, teaching, and scholarship in digital age. *Educational Researcher, 38*(4), 246-259. doi: 10.3102/0013189X09336671

Gunter, G., & Kenny, R. (2008). Digital booktalk: Digital media for reluctant readers. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, *8*(1). Retrieved from http://www.citejournal.org/vol8/iss1/currentpractice/article1.cfm.

Guzzetti, B. J., & Gamboa, M. (2011). Zines for social justice: Adolescents girls writing on their own. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *39*(4), 408-436. doi: 10.1598/RRQ.39.4.4

Hague, C., & Williamson, B. (2010). Digital participation, digital literacy and schools. *Curriculum Leadership*, *8*(10). Retrieved from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/digital_participation,_digital_literacy_and_school,31055.html?issueID=12105

Hague, C., & Payton, S. (2011). Digital literacy across the curriculum. *Curriculum Leadership,* 9(10). Retrieved from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/default.asp?id=33211

Honan, E. (2008). Barriers to teachers using digital texts in literacy classrooms. *Literacy*, *42*(1), 36-42.

Hughes, J. M. (2007). Teaching language and literacy, K-6. Retrieved from http://faculty.uoit.ca/hughes/Contexts/CriticalLiteracy.html

International Reading Association. (2012). Adoloescent literacy: A position statement of the International Reading Association. Retrieved from http://www.reading.org/Libraries/resources/ps1079_adolescentliteracy_rev2012.pdf

Janks, H. (2010). *Literacy and power*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Jewitt, C. (2003). Rethinking assessment: Multimodality, literacy and computer-mediated learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy, Practice*, *10*(1), 83-102.

Jewitt, C. (2009). An introduction to multimodality. In C. Jewitt (Ed.), *The routledge handbook of multimodal analysis* (pp. 14-27). New York, NY: Routledge.

Jones, S., & Enriquez, G. (2011). Engaging the intellectual and the moral in critical literacy education: The four –year journey of two teachers from teacher education to classroom practice. *Reading Research Quarterly, 44*(2), 145-168.

Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2008). Introduction: Initial development of the 'multiliteracies' concept. In S. Mary & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education, Volume 1: Language policy and political issues in education* (pp.195-211). Dordrechht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Kim, M., & Boyle, E. H. (2012). Neoliberalism, transnational education norms, and education spending in the developing world, 1983-2004. *Law & Social Inquiry*, *37*(2), 367-394.

Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Lau, S. M. C. (2013). A study of critical literacy work with beginning English language learners: An integrated approach. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *10*(1), 2-30. doi: 1080/15427587.2013.753841

Lewis, A., & Smith, D. (1993). Defining higher order thinking. *Theory into Practice*, *32* (3), 131-137.

Lewison, M., Flint, A. S., & Van Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, *79*(5), 382–392.

Lewison, M., Leland, C., & Harste, J. (2008). *Creating critical classrooms: K-8 reading and writing with an edge*. New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Macedo, D. (2005). Literacy: What matters? *Language Arts*, *81*(1), 12-13.

Marsh, J. (2011). Young children's literacy practices in a virtual world: Establishing an online interaction order. *Reading Research Quarterly, 46*(2), 101-118.

McClay, J. K., & Mackey, M. (2009). Distributed assessment in OurSpace: This is not arubric. In A. Burke & R. F. Hammet (Eds.), *Assessing new literacies: Perspectives from the classroom*, (pp.113-132). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

McDonald. M. (2007). The joint enterprise of social justice teacher education. *Teachers College Record*, *109*(8), 2047-2081.

McLean, C. A. (2010). A space called home: An immigrant adolescent's digital literacy practices. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *54*(1), 13-22.

Miller, S. (2005). Shattering images of violence in young adult literature: Strategies for the classroom. *English Journal*, *94*(5), 87–93.

New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, *66*(1), 60-92.

Noddings, N. (1991). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2006). *Critical lessons: What our schools should teach*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

O'Neil, K. (2010). Once upon today: Teaching for social justice with postmodern picturebooks. *Children's Literature in Education*, *41*(1), 40-51.

Page, M. A. (2012). Adventures with text and beyond: Popular culture-The new literacy challenge for English teachers. *English Journal*, *102*(2), 129-133.

Pirbhai-Illich, F. (2010). Aboriginal students engaging and struggling with critical multiliteracies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *54(*4), 257-266.

Reid, J. (2011). "We don't Twitter, we Facebook": An alternative pedagogical space that enables critical practices in relation to writing. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique,10*(1), 58-80.

Senzai, N. H. (2010). *Shooting Kabul*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books

Stake, R. (2000). Case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln, (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.435-454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Stevens, L., & Bean, T. (2007). *Critical literacy: Context, research, and practice in the K-12 classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Street, B. V. (2003). What's new in new literacy studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, *5*(2), 77-91.

Taylor, L. K., Bernhard, J. K., Garg, S., & Cummins, J. (2008). Affirming plural belonging: Building on students' family-based cultural capital through multiliteracies pedagogy. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *8*(3) 269-294.

Walsh, C. (2009). The multi-modal redesign of school texts. *Journal of Research in Reading, 32*(1), 126-136.

Williams, P. J. (2009). Technological literacy: A multiliteracies approach for democracy. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education, 19*(3), 237-254. doi: 10.1007/s109798.007.9046.0

Wilson, N., Dasho, S., Martin, A. C., Wallerstein, N., Wang, C. C., & Minkler, M. (2007). Engaging young adolescents in social action through photovoice: The

Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) Project. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, *27*(2), 241-261. doi:10.1177/0272431606294834

Wolfe, S., & Flewitt, R. (2010). New technologies, new multimodal literacy practices and young children's metacognitive development. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 40*(4), 387-399.

Wolk, S. (2009). Reading for a better world: Teaching for social responsibility with young adult literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *52*(8), 664-673.

Wright, M. F., & Kowalczyk, S. (2000). Peace by piece: The freeing power of language and literacy through the arts. *English Journal*, *89*(5), 55–63.

Vasudevan, L., Schultz, K., & Bateman, J. (2010). Rethinking composing in a digital age: Authoring literate identities through multimodal storytelling. *Written Communication*, *27*(4), 442-468. doi: 10.1177/0741088310378217

Yelland, N., Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2008). Learning by design: Creating a pedagogical framework for knowledge building in the twenty-first century. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *36*(3), 197-213.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zach, L. (2006). Using a multiple-case studies design to investigate the information-seeking behavior of arts administrators. *Library Trends, 55*(1), 4-21.

Dr. Anne Burke is an Assistant Professor at University of Ontario Institute of Technology.
Shawnee Hardware is a graduate student at University of Ontario Institute of Technology.
Dr. Janette Hughes is an Associate Professor at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology.
Stephanie Thompson is a graduate student at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology.